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ABSTRACT

This 1974/75 survey with a follow-up study in 1980 assembles data on the management and use of vertical file (VF) collections in the 18 libraries of the City University of New York. Results of questionnaires sent to 188 reference department heads or reference librarians show that the sizes of the VF collections studied range from 1,000 to 79,000 pamphlets and that respondents have a favorable attitude toward the use of VF material. Findings are also recorded for pamphlet circulation procedures and statistics; respondents' reasons for provision of VF collections; selection tools for pamphlet acquisition; subject arrangement of vertical files; cataloging practices; physical location of vertical files; staff time devoted to vertical files; allocation of file maintenance activities to different types of library personnel; publicity provided for vertical files; weeding of vertical files; and respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of vertical files, amount of file usage, and value of this usage in relation to other reference materials. Current problems in proper file maintenance identified in eight on-site visits are reported, and recommendations for the enhancement of vertical file collections are provided. (Author/ESR)

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THE VERTICAL FILE IN THE LIBRARIES OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK: A SURVEY.

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INTRODUCTION

In school and public libraries vertical file collections have generally been considered a vital supplement to the general book collection and an important part of good reference service.[1,2,3,4] On the other hand the development and use of pamphlet files on the college and university level has not been as universally accepted. As a matter of fact, a review of the literature has revealed that in the past twenty years very little writing, let alone research has been done on the place of vertical files in academic libraries.

Since 1958, about ten articles have more or less dealt with the vertical file in school and public libraries as against three that spoke about pamphlet collections in academia. Concerning the latter, one article was written by a library school student as part of a project to evaluate the existing pamphlet file in the social sciences area of the University of Oklahoma libraries. What she discovered was a little used file that needed much weeding. What she recommended was an active system of acquisition which we later found to be one of the reasons for the two largest pamphlet collections within CUNY libraries. Another observation which also coincided with our own was that in a university library a well organized pamphlet file of supplementary materials can have educational and research value.[5]

Another article discussed how the little used pamphlet collection at Brooklyn College took on a new direction as the social sciences reference librarians decided to aggressively go after information to satisfy the information needs of the "new"Open Admissions student. The result was an extensive, contemporary issues oriented and heavily used pamphlet collection. The author also recommended that librarians be alert and resourceful in gathering pamphlet information that can add the necessary variety and depth

to a library's total resources.[6]

The last article by Dorothy Wells was a study of the use of the vertical file collection at Ball State University.[7] She discovered that the little known existence of the vertical file was a major factor in the amount of usage that took place.[8] This matched another recommendation in the University of Oklahoma study which called for publicizing the availability and contents of the files in order to encourage its use.[9] Though Wells saw the vertical file as costly especially in terms of a librarian's salary, its popularity made it worthy of selective acquisition and the"best of organization." This meant that the professional in charge had to have an adequate budget and the time to search for materials. She concluded that by applying a system of dynamic development to the vertical file one can convert it into a " vital adjunct to cataloged materials."[10]

The literature we examined on vertical file collections in academic libraries agreed more or less on the need for organization, sustained development, time, budget, staff and space if one was to produce and maintain this resource for reference service. But why the sparsity of articles? A safe assumption was that few college libraries attached enough importance to the above need, no doubt viewing vertical files more as stepchildren, belonging in school and public libraries rather than as natural, integral parts of the total academic reference family.

We however viewed pamphlet files as one of the better suppliers of easy to handle information, saw a place for them in our respective libraries and thus devoted time and energy to their sustained development. Faced with ever increasing demands for on-the-spot information coupled at the same time with no growth budgets, we saw how pamphlet collections were strengthening our general book collections by significantly filling in the gaps in current needs and also making material more easily accessible for student use. What we have at present and hope to maintain for the future are two unique and special sources of information.

We weren't sure, however, how the other libraries in the City University felt about the acquisition and care of pamphlet material and how extensive the individual collections were. As we indicated, the literature on the subject was sparse and maybe that was a clue to a lack of interest on the part of college reference librarians. Since we felt strong about the value of pamphlets in academic reference work, we decided that maybe a survey was necessary to provide some insight into the role and use of the vertical file in an academic library. With that in mind we undertook the following study.

CUNY VERTICAL FILE SURVEY

Purpose and Methodology

The rationale for undertaking this survey of the vertical file collections in the libraries of the City University of New York was to discover, if possible, the proper role of the vertical file in college and university libraries. The specific purpose of the study was to assemble some of the pertinent data about the management and use of vertical files at the CUNY libraries.

A questionnaire was designed, the purpose of which was first to investigate the specific practices employed in the organization, and maintenance of the files. The second purpose was to elicit the attitudes of those librarians who administer the files in addition to the others who use the pamphlet collection in their work with students, towards the use and place of vertical file material in reference service. We were hoping maybe to find a norm by which a single library might be guided in developing and maintaining vertical file collections.

There were actually two surveys conducted; one in 1974/1975 and a follow-up in the spring of 1980. We also made on-site visits to 8 CUNY libraries in the summer and fall of 1980. For purposes of this report the most recent information gathered from the questionnaires will be presented unless otherwise indicated, with the results of our personal visits confined to a later section.

The 1980 survey, as was the first 1974/75 survey was concerned with each college's " general reference " vertical file collections rather than their special departmental collections such as education, art, science etc. Both surveys were sent to all 18 CUNY college libraries in 2 parts. The first (all 29 questions) was mailed to the person most responsible for the management of the pamphlet collection, usually the chief of reference services. Out of 18 questionnaires mailed, 17 were returned. The second part (6 attitudinal questions) was sent to 61 reference librarians in an attempt to get their opinions about the vertical file and how it should or should not be utilized. There were 25 responses to this section. It should be noted here that the majority of these 61 respondents were different from those in the 74/75 mailing. In the 74/75 survey there were 66 returns out of 109 mailed out. When we totaled up the returns from both the 74/75 and 1980 surveys we got 108 usable responses out of 188 questionnaires sent, for about a 57% return rate for analysis.

The Survey Results

Size of Collections

The approximate number of pamphlets in the various libraries runs from a low of 1,000 to a high of 79,000 with many of the collections being between 3,000 and 6,000. There does not seem to be any direct correlation between the size of a college's enrollment and the size of their library's pamphlet collection in as much as 2 of the larger schools had relatively small collections and one of the smaller enrollment colleges had the third largest collection within the City University. Interestingly enough, we also discovered that 3 libraries had no vertical file collections at all. One gave no explanation, the second maintained that " it (VF) does not seem to be necessary for graduate students at the doctoral level," while the third felt that if they were to develop a decent vertical file it would " have to be fed into the subject catalog with see references, use Library of Congress subject headings to tie into the card catalog and be weeded frequently, which she believed to be " too time consuming" and thus " too expensive" to be maintained properly. In addition this same respondent believes that " students should learn to use the library resources and not just be handed a folder." This last point was also alluded to by another librarian,who, in answer to one of the attitudinal questions on pamphlet use, was concerned about the VF making librarians lazy by having them rely too

heavily on pamphlets as an"excuse for a poor reference interview."

Circulation Procedures

A variety of procedures were uncovered in regard to the circulation or non-circulation of pamphlets. This is perhaps one area where the experiences of different libraries might serve as guidelines in helping others to decide what their procedures should be.

Two units generally do not circulate pamphlets, four are flexible depending on the situation, and the remainder circulate on a regular basis for anywhere from one day to four weeks. Two libraries circulate primarily because of a lack of sitting space space rather than out of conviction that pamphlets should be allowed to circulate. Another two respondents indicated that since they circulate books for two weeks it seems logical to do likewise with pamphlets. One librarian was of the opinion that the circulation of pamphlets is the only method to enable students to make full use of a valuable resource. He also pointed out however that certain"hot" topics did not circulate. Another librarian reflecting a similar viewpoint said that it was"library policy to circulate as many materials as possible unless vitally needed."

At the other end of the scale were two libraries that took the position that the vertical file is part of the reference collection and therefore as a general rule the material should not circulate. Although one of them on occasion will loan out pamphlets that are not in demand by special permission for either overnight use or at the most one or two days. One library that was experiencing a high loss rate preferred that material which was in demand and difficult to replace did not circulate.

Of the 12 libraries that circulated pamphlets, 6 placed sufficient importance upon the material to try and retrieve it by sending out overdue notices at least when borrowing privileges were abused. Four units mailed out second notices and one library collected fines on overdue pamphlets at the rate of $.10 per day per transaction. This same library also placed circulation limits of 5 pamphlets per subject heading and a total of 10 per transaction in order to prevent a few persons from monopolizing pamphlets in the popular subject areas.

Circulation Statistics

The participants were also asked to indicate how many pamphlets were circulated annually during the years 1970-1979 and the approximate percentage of pamphlets not returned. For the libraries that kept circulation figures the results ranged from under 100 for one unit to a high of over 7,000 at another. One of the libraries that had an active pamphlet collection also kept in-house circulation statistics which showed for some years a rate 5 times greater than their out-of-library use. Those libraries that did circulate their vertical file items generally experienced negligible losses. There were also 5 libraries that did not keep any circulation statistics on pamphlet use.

General Purpose of Vertical Files

In addition to the diversity in approaches for maintenance of the vertical files there is also a variety of reasons as to why pamphlet collections are kept at all. The survey showed that the most often cited reasons were an interest in providing access to a wider range of subject materials that supplement the book collection, the desire to provide materials of a current nature, an interest in providing access to information from difficult to obtain materials, and the need to meet the demand for material in brief format. In summary there was a consensus that a good vertical file should be comprised of current, inexpensive, and concise materials which supplement the book and periodical collections and which would not ordinarily be cataloged.

Selection of Materials

In this part of the survey we asked the respondents to list in approximate order the sources they use to acquire material for the vertical file. As one might suspect those libraries that had the larger collections were able to draw their pamphlets from more sources than the smaller collections. The most frequently cited were:

Vertical File Index----------13
P.A.I.S.----------10
Monthly Catalog----------7
Newspapers----------7
Selected List of U.S.Publications--3
Library Journal----------3
Wilson Library Bulletin----------2

Other sources included Booklist, RQ, CIS, California State Publications, Sociological Abstracts, PS, newsletters from private and governmental agencies, miscellaeous bibliographies.

As for the inclusion of government documents in the VF, of the 8 libraries that have government document collections only 2 do not include them as pamphlet material.

When it came to methods used to obtain free pamphlet material all units utilize either or both a form postcard or a form letter; 9 libraries use form postcards, 7 use form letters and one library uses both methods.

Organization of Vertical Files

All of the libraries surveyed use a subject arrangement to organize the materials.The two most frequently used sources for subject headings are the Library of Congres List of Subject Headings and the Readers Guide to Periodical Literature. A complete breakdown of the respondents choices are as follows:

Library of Congress---------10
Readers Guide---------6
Popular headings---------5
Vertical File Index---------2
P.A.I.S.---------1
Sears---------1

Some of the reasons cited for these choices were in the case of the Library of Congress to make the VF conform with the card catalog and the hope of someday interfiling VF subject cards in the main catalog. Actually one library already uses color coded subject cards in the public catalog to direct users to the pamphlet files. In the case of the Readers Guide the respondents indicated that the subject headings were more popular than those in LC and in one library the pamphlet collection was adjacent to the index area. At least 5 libraries use popular terms in addition to the use of LC and the Readers Guide; these headings reflect more the way students ask for information, such as busing, test tube babies, volunteer army,etc.

When we asked the respondents if they included information on the file folders other than the subject heading, only 4 libraries indicated that they did. One gave pertinent LC call numbers,another occasionally gave call numbers of related books kept at the Reference desk, and 2 noted cross references to related subject areas.

When we asked the respondents if they included VF subject heading cards in the card catalog we discovered that only five libraries follow this procedure in one fashion or another. Their reasoning being that this would enable students who might otherwise be unaware of the existence of additional pamphlet information on a particular subject to locate this type of material.Three of the libraries have the cards interfiled in the subject catalog with cross references to the vertical file and two of them have the pamphlet file headings together in separate trays,one after the letter Z in the catalog and the other library using the first 2 drawers in the subject catalog. Some of the other respondents indicated that it was either unnecessary or more trouble than it was worth. Probably a vertical file collection in an accessible location might tend to obviate the additional task of compiling extra pamphlet heading cards. This operation may be too much of a luxury and may also depend upon the way students move throughout a particular library in their quest for information.

Related to the need to alert students to the existence of pamphlet information is the fact that all of the libraries have a subject guide to their vertical files. With one exception the guide is available for student use. Eleven of them include extensive cross references and three do not. One library which keeps its master guide behind the reference desk uses the pamphlet file cards as a type of information file also and includes such information as cross references to related pamphlet folders, related reference and circulating books with call numbers,sometimes even news clippings pasted on the cards.

Location of the Vertical File

The majority of the respondents indicated that their vertical files were located somewhere in the reference area, either near indexes or the reference desk. They felt that this made the files more accessible to students and reference staff and made for better supervision of its use. One library had the files in the main reading room next to the circulation desk,another adjacent to the subject catalog, while some based location on availability of space. Certainly a point to consider when it comes to location is also the availability of additional space for expansion of the files unless of course a vigorous weeding schedule is maintaind.

Staff Time Devoted to the Vertical File

We come now to one of the more crucial aspects of vertical file collection building, namely staff time. On this point the survey showed that staff time varied considerly from unit to unit with some librarians spending anywhere from 30 minutes(hard to believe)a week to 20 hours a week working on the vertical file. The majority of the librarians said they put in more like 3 to 10 hours a week. The amount of clerical assistance also varied from library to library, depending no doubt on budgetary constraints and priorities within each college. Only 6 libraries have the benefit of clerical help and their time working on the files also varied from a range of 2 to 12 hours a week. The libraries did somewhat better when it came to time from student aides,with 9 of them receiving student assistance from a low of 2 hours to a high of 30 hours a week at one library.

The survey results in this section when matched with the size of some of the collections showed quite clearly that those libraries which had the benefits of both professional and non-professional time to work on the files developed the larger collections. The results also demonstrated that the more time a librarian devoted to the pamphlet collection the larger the collection tended to be regardless of the amount of back-up by support staff.

Librarian, Clerical, Student Aide Responsibilities

There seems to be considerable consistency in the duties performed by librarians, clerks and student assistants. Librarians are primarily involved in the selection, classification and weeding processes. Clerical employees type orders as well as subject heading cards, file and send overdue notices. At one unit a clerk assists in the assigning of subject headings under the supervision of a librarian. Student aides for the most part clip and paste news articles, stamp and file pamphlets, prepare new pamphlet folders, refile pamphlets, and generally keep the vertical file area in order. One this last point,experience has shown at least in one library,that if one keeps the pamphlet area in good order by regularly refiling loose pamphlets and folders the students will follow your example and handle the material with better care.

Publicity

If you got it flout it but when it came to vertical files we found that 2 libraries make no effort to publicize the VF at all. The other libraries use such approaches as alerting students through the use of library publications, mentioning the vertical file during library orientation and instruction sessions, using signs and occasional displays of recent pamphlets, promoting it when providing reference service.

Weeding

Most of the respondents said that they attempt to weed out the collection at least once a year. The weeding process usually takes place during semester breaks and/or summers. Four libraries do not weed on a regular basis.

PART II

Unlike the first part of the survey which was directed to the heads of the various reference units, this part of the questionnaire was submitted to those librarians who have primary responsibility for the vertical files in their libraries plus those other librarians who may or may not use the files in their everyday work at the reference desk.Here an attempt was made to investigate how these librarians utilize the vertical files for certain situations and to gain insights into their attitudes towards the VF and how they view its function.Several aspects of the problem were covered,such as the usefulness of the VF for various student assignments and how the VF is used for a particular question in terms of the total reference sources available. In addition, the respondents were asked to comment as to whether or not students use the VF to the neglect of other informational sources and if the answer was yes how they would proceed to rectify the situation if they thought it required an adjustment. And finally, additional comments were invited.

Usefulness of the Vertical File

As one might suspect, those colleges with the largest pamphlet collections find them to be the most useful in fulfilling certain types of student assignments, especially short speeches, short term papers, and group discussions. Only one respondent found the VF not useful for short speech assignments, while another found

it not to be a useful resource for short term papers. Three librarians said it was not useful for long term papers,and two that it did not prove useful for group discussion assignments. Out of a total of 217 responses (1974/75 survey) only 9 indicated that the vertical file was not a helpful resource for the situations presented. In the 1980 followup, out of a total of 98 responses there were 7 that indicated that the vertical file was not useful for speeches, papers(short/long), group discussions. There were also 4 respondents who found the VF only sometimes useful for these same assignments. Interestly enough some of these same librarians also held attitudes that were generally negative toward the status of the pamphlet collection within the total reference picture. In the " very useful" category librarians found the VF to be less useful in fulfilling the needs of longer research assignmrnts than for the shorter ones. However, in the " useful " and " sometimes useful " categories librarians indicated that the VF was most effective in fulfilling long term paper assignments. From these results one can conclude that pamphlets are as useful in somewhat varying degrees for longer research assignmrnts as well as for the shorter ones. Four people even said that the VF was also useful for master theses and dissertations. These answers certainly showed beyond any doubt that pamphlets are a most valuable information source.

Use of VF in Terms of Total Reference Sources

The participants were then asked how they would handle the following hypothetical reference question assuming they had VF material on the subject. " Student needs information for a 10 minute speech, short term paper,"etc.

Would you:

(a) Give student VF only

(b) Give student VF file and reference books and also indicate that other sources are available (indexes, card catalog,etc)

(c) Use VF only as a last resort

(d) Ignore VF in favor of other reference tools

(e) Other

In the 1974/75 survey, 44 out of the 54 who responded to the question selected (b). Only 3 said they would completely ignore the VF. Six picked (c) and two chose (a), but only if the user specifically requested the VF. In the 1980 follow-up the results showed a

similar pattern with 32 out of 36 librarians selecting (b), 3 selecting (c) and 1 choosing (d).

One librarian tended to use the vertical file as a " low emphasis " source when working with the more serious student and another said they might do anyone of A thru D depending on student reading level and motivation. Several others qualified their answers with the comment that it depended on the nature of the topic as well as student needs. We would make a general observation on what goes on at the reference desk by saying the best approach, whenever possible is to first determine just exactly what the user needs and then try to match those needs with the relevant resources within the library, and even sometimes outside the library. This question of use led us into the next part of the survey since we had heard some criticism that pamphlets are used to the neglect of standard reference sources.

Use of VF by Students to Neglect of Other Information Resources(Indexes, Abstracts, Catalogs, Bibliographies,etc.)

During the 1974/75 survey out of a total of 59 responses received 40 answered in the negative that students do not frequently use pamphlets to the neglect of other information sources. The results of the 1980 survey showed that out of 26 responses, there were 15 no replies. The gap seemed to be narrowing but of course we realized that, as one librarian indicated that"it is sometimes difficult to determine what a student actually uses unless one follows them through the research procedure," and stays with them till the finish. Nevertheless we received some interesting comments from many librarians. Those who underscored the theme of some neglect of traditional reference sources placed most of the"blame" on the students who found the pamphlets more easier to use. Several librarians pointed out also that you cannot force students to use other more complicated tools if they are satisfied with what they have gathered from the vertical file collection. As one librarian pointed out, " sometimes circumstances make the VF the best answer." Probably the strongest comment to our question came from one librarian who said that " although the pamphlet file serves a useful purpose...it may prevent or delay students from learning to use indexes,card catalogs, reference books, a form of fraud;unfortunately the pamphlet file caters to the limitations of many of our students, it gives them just what they want to do the assignment and get the grade...too many of our students

have no intellectual curiosity or enthusiasm...if we do not teach them some of the methods of using a library they are being short-changed..."

The above criticism raises additional points about the place of reference service within a college library and the proper role of a reference librarian. This line of inquiry is beyond the scope of our survey but a few comments can be made especially in light of the previous question on the use of pamphlets. As we stated earlier a large majority of librarians believe students should be informed of the other research sources available to them.

Rather than lay the blame in the drawers of the vertical file collection as being an easy way out for students, the authors would agree more with the statement made earlier by another librarian that vertical files don't make"students lazy...it makes librarians lazy... by having them rely to much on pamphlets as an excuse for a poor reference interview."

The situation requires that reference librarians engage in a give and take two-way communication process that will zero in on user needs and alert students to other sources for additional information and then actively assist them(whenever possible) in using these resources.Other librarians who were concerned about the dependence on pamphlets to the exclusion of other sources would lock the VF drawers and force the student to come to the reference desk for other references. One of our on-site visits did uncover a major vertical file operation where the cabinets were locked(for security purposes also) thus requiring students to begin their search for information at the reference desk.

Additional remedies offered included greater use of library instruction in how to use indexes,etc; advertise the other resources in the pamphlet area with effective signs; show students other information sources during orientation tours; ask teachers to require the use of indexes, bibliographies, reference books,etc.

Status of the Vertical File Collection

For our last question we asked the particpants if they "believed that the pamphlet collection should be an integral part of good reference service with more or less equal status with other resources such as indexes, reference books,etc."

In the 1974/75 survey there were 34 responses in the affirmative and 5 in the negative with many qualifying their answers. In the 1980 survey there were 21 yes responses and 4 no answers. These figures showed us that there is overwhelming agreement that the Vertical File should be an integral part of good reference service, but some took exception to its having equal status with the other resources. A number commented that its status and value depended on its being well maintained through weeding, inclusion of new material, etc. Several expressed the belief that the VF may be the best source for certain types of topical information.

Others mentioned that the VF provides a convenient starting place while other resources are searched. One librarian felt that that it can be useful but it suffers in comparison with other resources from the fact that only the librarian responsible for the VF knows what's"buried in its vaults." While this would seem to be inevitable to some degree there are several corrective measures which can help to alleviate this problem. One is to allow other reference librarians to review the new pamphlets before they are filed, and another is through an extensively cross referenced vertical file index.

One librarian commented that students seem to be less intimidated by pamphlet material than by other reference materials which matched another opinion that felt that pamphlets are particularly useful to the academically underprepared student who may be"frightened off by more complex reference sources."

The librarian responsible for one of the larger pamphlet collections said that VF material represent a very valuable part of the collection and frequently represent the " best source" for certain types of information.Another stressed the fact that pamphlets were a good way to provide information to users " quickly and efficiently."

Other responses included such comments as " pamphlets fill in neatly when books are missing," " extremely useful for English I and speech classes,""content too unpredictable and ephemeral" to be given equal status, " idea of pamphlets is good but students are losing the art of doing research and use books and journals less often...students are satisfied with less today,"

After a careful examination of all the statements it was clear from the respondents answers that except for a few negative

attitudes the majority of the reference librarians at the City University of New York view the vertical file collection as having a major place in reference service.

The respondents also had the opportunity to offer any additional comments they wanted on any aspect of vertical file collections. Some of the librarians offered statements that had already been alluded to in other sections of the survey, such as the danger in pamphlets overshadowing other sources, with students and reference librarians seeing them as the answer to all reference questions. One librarian stated that pamphlets are often underutilized because students do not know about them. Another preferred that students didn't rely too heavily on pamphlets because much of the material is stolen and out of date and they can't afford clerical help to help in the ordering and processing of pamphlets. There was also the hope that the survey will alert librarians to the dangers of relying too much on pamphlet information instead of engaging in that time honored procedure known as the reference interview. Then there was a recommendation to assign 1 librarian at each campus the responsibility of developing and maintaining a vertical file collection (close on to) a full time basis with proper back up support.

We personally feel that if the needs of the user are the bottom line they should be given the choice of what to use by being exposed to all the most relevant sources that can best supply the necessary information, including quick, concise, easily accessible facts via pamphlets in addition to instruction in the use of the more sophisticated indexes and abstracts.

On-Site Visits

An assessment of both mail questionnaires revealed that there is widespread agreement as to the importance of the pamphlet collection and yet some libraries give it a much lower priority than others. This inconsistency sparked our interest to visit selected CUNY libraries, examine the vertical file collections first hand and talk to the person responsible for its management.

We visited 8 libraries in the summer and fall of 1980, 6 senior and 2 community college, and at all of them we saw visible evidence of the impact that the last 5 years of budget and personnel cuts have inflicted not only on vertical file collections but on all library services. These cuts are an important factor in the general

lack of growth and maintenance we encountered with most of the pamphlet collections we studied. A majority of the libraries lacked the proper professional and clerical help necessary to develop their collections and keep them current. We examined many files on different subjects and found them to be lacking current material on numerous subjects; they were also light in coverage; there were no pamphlets at all on such popular topics as acid rain, test-tube babies, women athletes, SALT II, children's television advertising, battered women, to name a few; they were all in need of heavy weeding.

As we had indicated earlier, just as the questionnaires showed very positive responses towards vertical file use, our personal interviews also showed that the majority of the librarians believed that the pamphlet collection should be developed to its full potential, given adequate staff and resources. Not surprisingly, just as there were some negative attitudes expressed in the survey, there were some librarians who told us during our visits that they would still give the VF low priority regardless of extra support in time, staff, and budget. The feeling we got was that since the care and feeding of the VF took time and effort and was not really treated as a regular assignment, it didn't rate the priority of say, reference desk work, collection development, committee assignments etc., it became something that got done as time allowed. One library has even made a conscious decision not to move in the direction of providing topical information through the use of pamphlets, relying instead on their periodicals division to handle the current information needs of their students.

The budget cuts have undoubtedly played havoc with all library services, but it must also be pointed out that the divergent approaches and attitudes towards developing pamphlet collections existed prior to these cuts. Based on our discussions, we would say that the strengths or weaknesses of the various collections rests squarely on the shoulders of individual librarians and how much importance they place on the development of VF collections and its place within the total picture of reference services.

After a few trips in the field it became evident that the single ingredient most necessary for the continued strong development of pamphlet collections was the aggressive initiative of these librarians. This was brought home quite vividly at one of the libraries we visited where we saw a comprehensive, well organized, and heavily used VF collection which was largely the result of the efforts of one librarian who was obviously dedicated to the maximun approach to reference service which emphasizes the delivery of specific, concise, factual, and relevant information to users. This was certainly a high priority operation.

One factor that seemed to be common in the libraries that had VF collections which were well developed and maintained, was stability of personnel. The longer a librarian was responsible for a particular collection the better shape we found it to be in. Constant turnover in staff mitigated against the continued development of VF collections.

Another possible factor contributing to the lack of consistency that surrounded the collections we saw is that in every instance the librarians interviewed indicated that the function and purpose of the collection had never been formally discussed among the library staff. As far as we were able to learn, Chief Librarians showed little leadership in determining the status and importance of the pamphlet collection at the different libraries.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

After studying the results of both surveys and interviews we were able to get a clearer picture of the strengths, weaknesses, use of the vertical file collections at the different CUNY libraries and why they are the way they are. We found considerable agreement among our colleagues that the vertical file should and can play an important role in the delivery of reference and information service in college libraries.That many CUNY librarians saw the need for current pamphlet files and its great potential for instant information supported our position better than we had expected considering again the few articles on the subject. We also found different approaches to its development in terms of size, sources of selection, circulation procedures, organization, staff time, etc. This diversity made it that much more difficult to find a standard by which CUNY libraries might be guided in developing VF collections. Maybe a systematic policy for the pamphlet collection is really unobtainable given the uniqueness of the material, its unpredictability, its capacity to quickly adapt to change, all because of the varied styles of the librarians in charge of each collection.

As we said earlier, the key element in the whole formula of why and how the vertical file gets to be what it is or is not is just how strongly the librarian believes in the value of quick information for student assignments. We saw how one library/librarian will follow a certain path by aggressively seeking out pamphlets and trying to maximize their use, while others will put forth a minimal effort. The only conclusion we can draw from the facts as we perceive them and also based on the actual experiences of at least 3 libraries, is that some librarians not only carry their belief in pamphlets further than others, but are in turn more alert to new sources and techniques for connecting the user to information, support staff and time notwithstanding. If a librarian becomes an advocate for an area of library service and demonstrates its usefulness and value the chances are the necessary support will eventually be forthcoming.

As for value and usefulness, when you think about it what better way to get out from under our information dilemma than with pamphlets. When the demand for mass information rises, especially for speech, group discussion, and short research paper assignments, and we see a rise in missing and mutilated magazines, the often underrated pamphlet collection will provide the answer for many a harried librarian. Students in turn will get the benefits of a good start and positive experience in their search for data.

If we attach primary importance to the information needs of the user and if we firmly believe that strong VF collections can go a long way to satisfy those needs, then the question of devoting adequate time to its development can be overcome. Even though the libraries with the larger collections had the benefit of staff time these same libraries also had the benefit of having librarians as advocates for these collections who were continually demonstrating its value.

Again in regards to development or non-development of the vertical file we can't overlook the role that library administrators play. It is our judgment that the pamphlet collection is most likely to fulfill its potential as an important component of total academic reference and information service, when and if the chief librarian assumes a leadership role in establishing it as a high priority item. This should include discussing the proper role of the VF with the entire library staff.

An additional, but important beginning step would be to assign reference librarians, who have a proven commitment to developing pamphlet

collections, full time,to the task of organizing and maintaining them, and providing the librarian/advocate with proper assistance, equipment, space, and supplies. This should signal a commitment from the top, that support will be given to the sustained development of the VF and the collection to quote Wells " will not be allowed to stagnate." [11]

Academic reference librarians should give the same commitment to the concept of user oriented pamphlet information as they do to the development of the basic reference collection and library instruction services.

We believe there is much information and experience that can and should be shared among the various libraries in the CUNY system, and it is our hope that this survey will be a beginning step toward greater communication and cooperation. Our study was never intended to be scientific, but rather a starting point for further research.

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